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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU'S U.S. TRIP,
WASHINGTON-BEIJING-TAIPEI RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage March 18-20 on a railway accident in Pingtung; the freeway electronic toll collection system scandal; the DPP and PFP rallies in Taipei March 18 and March 19, respectively; and the year-end Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral race. All major Chinese-language papers reported U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's interview with the Australian Broadcasting Company last Thursday. The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" carried Rice's interview by running a banner headline on its front page March 18 that read: "United States Reminds China Not to Aim Its Missiles at Taiwan." The pro-status quo "China Times," on the other hand, ran the news story in its inside pages March 18 with a different headline: "Rice [Says] During an Interview with Australia Media: The United States Has the Responsibility to Urge Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait to Avoid Conflict." The "Taiwan Daily" also ran a banner headline on its page two March 18 that quoted U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman as saying: "United States Will Address the People's Liberation Army's Possible Showdown Actions Toward Taiwan."

In addition, the "China Times" spent two-thirds of its page four March 20 carrying news stories and analyses on KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's trip to the United States. One of the news stories said Ma did not deny the rumors suggesting he will 'accidentally/by coincidence' meet with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick in Washington.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "China Times" news analysis probed Taiwan-Washington relations over the past six years in terms of Washington's interactions with President Chen Shui-bian, and pointed out that Washington will use Ma to restrain Chen while Chen will use Taiwan independence as a countermeasure to restrain Washington. A separate "China Times" news analysis called Ma's trip to the United States his first "interview" with Washington as the latter is very concerned about Ma's stance with regard to cross-Straits relations and U.S. arms procurements. Hsu Yung-ming, Assistant Research Fellow at the Academia Sinica Institute of Social Science, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" that Washington will put Ma under close scrutiny from the perspective of U.S. national interests. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said Ma is under pressure to explain to Washington why his party is still blocking the U.S. arms procurement bill. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed U.S. National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley's remarks last Thursday on the cross-Straits situation by saying no one can blame Taiwan for trying to find out "how far it can go" without going too far in China's opinion, because "it cannot roll over and die and do nothing to maximize the scope of its freedom." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" commented on Rice's remarks and said

both Washington and Beijing must "accept the fact that the Taiwan people will continue to pursue democracy and peace, regardless of the PRC's suppression or enticements." End summary.

A) "Washington Uses Ma to Restrain Bian, and Bian Uses [Taiwan] Independence as a Countermeasure to Restrain [Washington]"

Journalist Lin Shu-ling said in a news analysis in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (3/20):

"Taipei-Washington relations over the past six years since Chen Shui-bian has been in office [as the president] can be divided into two stages, with the year 2004 marking the dividing line. Before 2004, especially when Chen was first elected, whatever Washington said [to Taipei] counted; the Bian administration always took the initiative in preparing and handing every of Chen's draft speeches, be it his inaugural address or the Double Ten holiday speech, to the State Department for its review. But such a situation took a sudden turn in 2003 when Chen disregarded Washington's warnings and insisted on pushing for [Taiwan's first-ever] referendum; [Chen's recent announcement of the] 'cessation of the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG)' also was the result of a similar situation.

"Bian no longer obeys whatever the United States says because he knows very clearly that Washington, fearing deeply that it might be dragged into a cross-Strait war, must act more proactively in mediating between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. In addition, given the strategic conflicts between the United States and China, Washington is using Taiwan to restrain Beijing, so it cannot possibly tilt toward China too much. The Bian administration thus believes that as long as Taiwan is able to move two steps forward, one step backward, and 'adjust a little,' it will be able to achieve some breakthroughs in the end.

"This approach adopted by Chen in dealing with the United States has succeeded at least twice over the past six years. Rumors have it that U.S. President George W. Bush was quite upset with Chen's

constant 'airing of an opposing view,' but no one can prove that. But it is absolutely sure that Chen has given Washington a severe headache, or Washington would not have so many follow-up moves in the wake of [Chen's announcement] to 'cease the NUC and NUG.' After having been beaten so badly by the Bian administration, Washington is evidently planning new moves with Ma Ying-jeou's current visit to the United States. ... What on earth will Washington discuss with Ma? Bian actually knows the answer very clearly. ...

"The pan-Green camp, in an attempt to create an anti-U.S. and anti-Japan image for Ma, used to tell Washington that the pan-Blue camp was the one that has been blocking the [U.S.] arms procurement bill. Ma's trip to Washington this time will be very conducive to improving his relations with the United States. But given Washington's flexible and resourceful approach in managing international affairs, the pan-Blue camp should not indulge in the wishful thinking that it has won U.S. support. The key in reality lies in how the United States will interact with the Blue and Green camps and use Ma to rein in Chen. The U.S. approach is to make sure that the Bian administration understands that if it fails to work with Washington, chances are there that Washington will turn to [work with Ma] and form a new triangular relationship between Washington, Bian and Ma. ...

"Over the next two years, Bian will still have to rely on the United States in many aspects, but he certainly will not play the 'good boy' obediently in front of Washington. Washington wants 'to use Ma to rein in Bian,' and Bian will counter-balance it using '[Taiwan] independence' to see who will win the upper hand. A senior pro-independence local activist who has close interactions with Bian was quoted as saying that Chen has a lot of things that he can do during his remaining two-year term, and that Washington will have a difficult time if Chen really gets upset and turns against the United States."

B) "Ma's First 'Interview' [with Washington] Carries Subtle Significance"

Journalist Hsiao Hsu-tseng commented in a news analysis in the

pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (3/20):

"... Ma Ying-jeou's visit to the United States has several layers of great significance: First, this is his first time to visit the United States since he took over the helm of the KMT. He will engage in direct dialogue with high-ranking American officials in the capacity as Taiwan's major opposition leader. Second, Ma is a potential candidate for [Taiwan's] next presidential election, and Washington is very concerned about whether Ma's position with regard to cross-Straits relations and U.S. arms procurements will affect the U.S. interests in the future. Washington, without doubt, will have to deal with Ma. ...

"Ma's trip to the United States this time is his first 'interview' [with Washington] as a candidate for the position of future Taiwan leader. In addition, it may be a new strategy of the United States to try to explore another channel for contacting Taiwan's opposition party, in an attempt to grasp a leverage to 'balance' the 'unpredictable' political situation in Taiwan. Whether Ma will reap rich harvests this time may also generate a new and subtle impact on the Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations."

C) "The Questions Ma Ying-jeou Will Have to Answer During His Trip to the United States"

Hsu Yung-ming, Assistant Research Fellow at the Academia Sinica Institute of Social Science, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (3/18):

"... As a potential pan-Blue presidential candidate for 2008, the Americans will definitely put Ma under close scrutiny in an attempt to analyze this political figure from the perspective of U.S. national interests. ... As a result, there are probably three questions that the Americans want to ask Ma: the first one is about [the KMT's] concrete list of arms procurements [from the United States]. ... The second one is that the Americans are concerned about Ma's reported 'anti-Japan and keeping a distance from the United States' stance ... The last question, which is also of major concern to the Taiwan people, is whether Ma will say something new about his stance regarding cross-Straits relations. ..."

D) "Leadership Needed on Arms Package"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] commented in an editorial (3/19):

"As he prepares to begin a weeklong trip to the United States widely as a prelude to his campaign for president in 2008, Kuomintang (KMT) Chairman Ma Ying-jeou is already under pressure to explain why his

party is still blocking a major arms deal involving U.S. supplies. ... While he has yet to reveal exactly what the KMT will propose and how it will differ from the government-proposed arms package blocked by the KMT and its allies, it is widely believed that Ma will prioritize the importation of some weapons, while proposing to consider other items in separate, future budget reviews.

"We hope that Ma can propose a level-headed compromise on the arms issue so that the modernization of our armed forces will not be permanently harmed. ... However, we hope that Ma can tell our American friends that while we understand their frustration with the seemingly endless delays, they should not oversimplify our situation and interpret it as defeatism, either. ... While it is true that some of our 'pan-blue' politicians have downplayed the military threat posed by communist China, at the same time Ma needs to tell his American hosts that military budgets in Taiwan are subject to the same kinds of political give-and-take that they face in the U.S. Congress. ...

"If Ma can be forthcoming and reasonable on this issue, American confidence in our system of government will increase and Washington will have no reason to fear a change of power in the next presidential election. But the KMT and its 'pan-blue' allies will have to make sure that any proposals made by Ma are taken seriously and efforts are made to resolve the arms budget conflict in spite of President Chen's political antics."

E) "Everybody Loses in a War"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/19):

"Last week, US President George W. Bush's national security adviser Stephen Hadley hit the bull's-eye by commenting that 'everybody loses' in the event of a clash in the Taiwan Strait. The 'everyone' referred to not only Taiwan and China, but also the US and the entire region. ... Everyone in Taiwan knows that China has threatened to use force if Taiwan unilaterally declares independence. Without a doubt, that is a step that the Taiwanese government will not carelessly make, regardless of who holds the presidency. Add in the fact that the majority of the people in Taiwan are not ready at this point to directly provoke Beijing this way.

"Instead, the more pressing question for Taiwan at this moment is how far can it go without raising the 'independence' red flag for the Chinese government? Can Taiwan participate in international organizations such as the UN and the WHO? Can Taiwan draft a new constitution that meets its current practical needs? No one really knows. That is why the Taiwanese government has to find out in an incremental fashion and through trial and error - a process which has sparked tensions and concerns from Beijing and the US. However, one can hardly blame the Taiwanese government; it cannot roll over and die and do nothing to maximize the scope of its freedom. ...

"The truth of the matter is 'everybody wins' if Beijing continues to thrive economically and, even more importantly, becomes fully democratized. The people of Taiwan may just choose unification voluntarily then. Beijing would not have to get into a war with Taiwan and the risk becoming an enemy of the entire world - the US in particular. So while Bush's call for the democratization of China in his 'National Security Strategy' report last week is nothing new, it reflects the truth."

F) "U.S. Security Policy Merits Serious Look"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] wrote in an editorial (3/20):

"... As Rice pointed out, Washington's gravest concern lies not only in Beijing's continued double-digit increase of the military budget but also in the PRC's grave lack of transparency in decision-making process. ... Since Washington and the Chen administration have reached a consensus on how to interpret the 'cessation' of the NUC and NUG, both sides should face up to the reality that Beijing's military ambitions constitute a 'clear and present danger' to the Asia Pacific region. ...

"The publication of the U.S. National Security Strategy Report for 2006 is a timely reminder to those, such as KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, who have depicted a fanciful vista of an ultimate unification between Taiwan and China. ... Most importantly, Beijing, and Washington as well, must accept the fact that the Taiwan people will continue to pursue democracy and peace, regardless of the PRC's suppression or enticements. Bush should press Hu to face this reality and sincerely engage Taiwan's democratically-elected government in dialogue without preconditions. ..."

YOUNG